

Mrs. Zalmon Wakeman House
418 Harbor Road
Southport
Fairfield County
Connecticut

HABS No. CONN-297

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. CONN-297

MRS. ZALMON WAKEMAN HOUSE

Location: 418 Harbor Road (south side of street), Southport,
Fairfield County, Connecticut.

USGS Westport Quadrangle Map; Universal Transverse
Mercator Coordinates: 18.644320.4555020

Present Owner
and Occupant: Edwin and Madelyn Ricotta

Present Use: Residence

Statement of
Significance: The Zalmon Wakeman residence was designed by the
locally prominent architects Lambert & Bunnell. It
is a fine example of the Second Empire style which
reached its peak of popularity along the Eastern
seaboard during the 1870s. The elegant wooden de-
tailing of the piazza and projecting bays, finely
carved by the power lathe and chisel was made pos-
sible by a more mature post-Civil War technology.
Interior details are as lavish and artistically
executed as exterior surfaces. Common to Second
Empire architecture, the Wakeman house is character-
ized by complex detailing, variegated surfaces,
polygonal bays, deeply recessed windows and dormers
with stilted segmental-arched and circular openings
which pierce the Mansard roof. Zalmon Wakeman was
a prominent sea captain and ship-owner in Southport.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1871. The Southport "Chronicle"
reported on March 1, 1871 that "W. W. Wakeman, Esqu., is
about to erect, on the Hill, 'a very handsome residence.'
Although we have not seen the plans, we know Mr. Wakeman
well enough to be able to say that this will be one of the
most attractive houses in this town." On August 23, 1871
the "Chronicle" noted: "W. W. Wakeman is erecting a stately
mansion which crowns one of the most eligible sites on the
hill (Rose Hill)." William W. Wakeman was the son of
either Zalmon B. Wakeman or Captain William Wakeman (see
Conn-301). He built this house for Mrs. Zalmon Wakeman
(who died in 1873) and her daughters Mary and Frances.

2. Architects: Lambert & Bunnell: Henry A. Lambert and Rufus W. Bunnell were a Bridgeport architectural firm who designed buildings in Southport during the 1860s and 70s. Their work here included the Moses Bulkley House (Conn-299), the Mrs. Benjamin Pomeroy House (Conn-298), and Southport Congregational Church (Conn-311). According to Bunnell, for a considerable period during the latter part of the nineteenth century, he and Lambert were the only architects practicing in the Bridgeport area. In 1881, two items in the "Standards" newspaper listed Lambert as practicing alone, which indicates that the firm had dissolved.

3. Original and subsequent owners: References to the chain of title to the land upon which the structure stands are in the Office of the Recorder of Deeds, Fairfield Town Hall, Fairfield, Connecticut.

1856 Deed, July 19, 1856, recorded in Volume 51, page 742. Zalmon Wakeman to Zalmon B. Wakeman and William W. Wakeman.

1869 Deed, November 12, 1869, recorded in Volume 57, page 620. Zalmon B. and William W. Wakeman to Mary F. Frances and Sarah Ann Wakeman.

1913 Deed, November 12, 1913, recorded in Volume 83, page 460-61. Mary F. Wakeman to Frances Wakeman, half interest.

1919 Deed, October 21, 1919, recorded in Volume 95, page 667. Frances Wakeman to Edward B. Sturgis.

1938 Deed, October 3, 1938, recorded in Volume 170, page 181. Edward B. Sturgis, II to Aline K. Fox and Esther D. Waterman.

1951 Deed, April 30, 1951, recorded in Volume 264, page 26-28. Aline Kate Fox and Esther D. Waterman to Florence H. Jones

1955 Deed, March 10, 1955, recorded in Volume 325, page 52. Florence H. Jones to James T. Donovan.

1960 Deed, January 29, 1960, recorded in Volume 404, page 367. James T. Donovan to Marion O. Donovan.

1964 Deed, March 31, 1964, recorded in Volume 464, page 615. Marion O. Donovan to Edwin C. Ricotta and Madelyn K., his wife.

4. Original plan and construction: Existing original plans by Lambert & Bunnell of Bridgeport include exterior elevation of the east, west and north facades, and plans of the attic, first and second floors. Though the prints are not dated, we can infer from contemporary nineteenth-century newspaper accounts that they were drawn circa 1870.

As originally designed, the structure is two stories with a full attic and partially exposed basement and nearly square in plan, measuring forty-four feet six inches (southeast front facade) by forty-nine feet ten inches with a pantry wing at the rear which is eleven feet deep. The house's weight rests upon a foundation of irregularly coursed cut stone; the cellar is seven feet below the first floor timbers. First-floor joists are three by eleven, set sixteen inches from center and bridged two-tier to each length. Joist members and bridging for the flooring of the second level are identical to the first floor; they are set eighteen inches from center. Attic framing is constructed in the same manner as on the lower levels, members are two by ten and set eight inches from center. Rafters supporting the Mansard roof are two by seven and set two feet apart at center. The three-foot nine-inch wall fabric consists of wooden clapboarding on the exterior, a layer of rough sheathing, stud framing, a layer of lath and plaster, furring, and interior walls of lath and plaster.

The elegant wooden detailing of the front (southeast) piazza brings into sharp focus an authentically American ingenuity. Mechanical technology, forced to develop on a larger, widespread scale during the Civil War, had become markedly more sophisticated by the late 1860s-70s, making possible such spectacular works of Victorian architecture in wood. The clusters of squared slender colonettes, finely detailed by the power lathe and chisel, rest on molded block bases and form flat-topped and stilted arched openings. The arch imposts of the front doorway's deeply molded architrave are finely detailed in a motif similar to the colonettes. A string of thin wooden balusters encompasses the porch area.

The complexity of the facade's ornament is arranged in a decorative scheme; the plan is also logical. Different in kind than the rectilinear designs of the Adamesque and Greek styles, or even the Italian Renaissance mode which flaunts a richer facial appearance than the earlier types, the highly individualized components of this particular Second Empire work have been laid out in a logical progression to emphasize sharp breaks, rounded curves and warm, interesting shadows. Each detail stands out as a separate entity, while also augmenting the effect of the total, unified composition.

Projecting at the front of the two-story polygonal end bay is an angular bay window which forms the extension of the front parlor. Heavily molded, the bay's narrow windows are set deep into their frames and topped by a frieze of square panels and a medieval Dutch gable, continuing upward on the wall face to culminate in a carved finial ornament. A projecting bay on the southwest (side) elevation - an extension of the sitting room - is entirely different in design than the one just described. It is semi-octagonal in shape with large stilted-arched window openings separated by slender engaged columns which support the original shaped gable roof.

All principal windows are one-over-one double-hung sash with molded surrounds and projecting sills. Most openings are topped by elaborate window heads of a plain fascia board, a fileted cornice supported by decorative corbels, and capped by a half-Mansard roof. A shingled Mansard roof covers the main block of the house.

Projecting beyond the wall, the roof overhang creates a wide eave supported by simply molded consoles. Characteristic of the Second Empire style, dormers with stilted segmental-arched and circular openings pierce the roof surface.

As has been suggested, interior arrangements closely resemble the massing of exterior sections. The interior was arranged on what is essentially a modified central-hall plan. Entering from the piazza entrance into the central hall, the drawing room is to the right, the sitting room to the left. Sliding doors separate the front sitting room from the back dining room. The central hall continues down toward the rear of the house, opening into the back hall and kitchen area or turning at a right angle at the drawing room's outside end wall. The main stairway to the second floor is built against the northwest wall of this latter section. All second-floor partitions correspond to the lay-out of the first floor.

The architects' design for interior details was as lavish and artistic as their plan for exterior surfaces. The power lathe and chisel were again used liberally, though not fanatically; sensitive execution without the faintest suggestion of gaudiness adorns all woodwork. The front drawing room is finished in elaborately carved white pine, which trims the fireplace and ceiling. Oak bookcases flanking the front sitting room's sliding door partitions, and black walnut cases in the dining room are finely carved with floral and fleur-de-lis details. The surrounds of the

expansive doorway between the front and back parlors are handsomely carved to complement the bookcases' detailing. The main stairway is trimmed with turned balusters and openwork brackets on the outside of the stair. While a variety of minutely detailed motifs are employed throughout the house on the carved woodwork, a unified design emerges.

5. Alterations and additions: Changes to the structure's original fabric have been minimal. A three-bay oriel window and a bay window were added to the west elevation in 1885. The Fairfield "Advertiser" reported on May 21st, "The Misses (Frances and Mary) Wakeman are having two bay windows built on their house." On April 16, 1903 the "Chronicle" made a vague reference to alterations on the house: "Improvements are being made to the property of the Misses Mary and Frances Wakeman."

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

Mary and Frances Wakeman were the original residents of the house, living here from 1871 until 1913. Their father, Zalmon Bradley Wakeman (1803-1865) and mother, Sarah Ann Fowler (1806-1873) married on March 3, 1829. Wakeman was a sea captain and owned his own fleet of ships.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: Original drawings, 1871, Lambert & Bunnell, architects. Drawings include three exterior elevations and three floor plans. Loaned by Miss Esther D. Waterman (418 Harbor Road, Southport) to Mrs. Joanna S. Zangrando (New Haven, Connecticut) in April 1946.

2. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Bunnell, Rufus W., personal journal. In the possession of Joanna Zangrando of New Haven, Connecticut. ✓

Fairfield County Deed Records, Office of the Recorder, Fairfield Town Hall, Fairfield, Connecticut.

b. Secondary and published sources:

Fairfield "Advertiser," May 21, 1885; March 28, 1890.

Southport "Chronicle," March 1, 1871; August 23, 1871; April 16, 1903.

Wakeman, Robert P. Wakeman Genealogy. Meriden, Conn:
Journal Publishing Co., 1900.

Prepared by Jan E. Cigliano
Staff Historian
Historic American
Buildings Survey
January 1979

PART II. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the Southport Historic District Commission, several members of whom provided the necessary funds. The project was completed in the summer of 1966 under the general direction of James C. Massey, then the Chief of HABS; Ralph Schwarz of the Ford Foundation; and Architect John C. Waite (Columbia University); with assistant architects Christopher Benninger (Harvard University), Richard Haines (University of Kentucky), and Andrew Craig Morrison (University of Michigan), and architectural historian David T. VanZanten (Harvard University), at the HABS Field Office in Southport, Connecticut. The data was prepared and edited in HABS Washington office in December 1978 by Jan E. Cigliano, staff historian. Photographs were taken by HABS staff photographer Jack E. Boucher in September 1966.